

[Dan J. Wilson]

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Life History

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Rangelore

Tarrant Co., Dist. #7 [16?]

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FEC

Dan J. Wilson, 80, living at 1508 Lincoln Ave., Fort Worth, Tex., was born on a farm in [Wayne?] co., Ky., Jan. 21, 1858. His father, George Wilson, was farming in Ky. at the commencement of the Civil War. He joined the Confederate Army and served during the entire period of the war. Due to Union sentiment in Wilson's neighborhood, confederate animosity existed against Wilson's Confederate sympathy. Because of this feeling, Mrs. George Wilson placed the family's [effects?] into a covered wagon and moved to Tenn., in 1864. She hired a man to drive the team and assist in meeting the hardships encountered on the way. At the close of the war, George Wilson returned to his family in Tenn. He purchased a tract of land in [Feuchess?] co. and engaged in farming for a livelihood. Dan J., Wilson came to Texas, with his wife and one child, in [1880?], and located in Clay co. He secured work on the farm operated by Tom Horn, who was then developing one of the few farms in the county. Dan took part in a fence war and was on the side of the small ranchers and settlers. After terminating his employment with Tom Horn, he worked on the Wright ranch, located in Clay co. He later negotiated for a tract of land and engaged in farming for his livelihood. His story:

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"My father, George Wilson, was a farmer and farmed a tract of land located in [Wayne?] co., Ky., and there is where I was born, Jan. 21, 1858.

"Father joined the Confederate Army when the Civil War started. Because the sentiment in the particular section where we lived ran strongly in favor of the Union cause, my folks were subjected to some ridicule. The situation caused mother to become very dissatisfied with that section of Ky. as a home. Therefore, she decided to move and chose Tenn. [as?] the place to live.

"Mother sold everything we owned, except our personal effects, which she loaded into a covered wagon, with a good team of mules hitched to the wagon, we started for Tenn. [?] [?] [?] 2 Mother hired a man to go with us and help make the trip.

"What was called a road in those days was anything with wheel tracks. Just a few streams contained a bridge over which to cross on. Fording streams was the method of crossing at most of the streams. When a heavy rain had taken place, we were compelled to wait till the water receded, and at times several days of waiting was necessary. A few of the larger stream's crossings had ferries operating to transport travelers from bank to bank. [We?] traveled over hills, through river [bottoms?] over rocks and in ruts.

"It was a slow, tedious trip but we finally arrived in [Fenchess?] co., Tenn., and there located. When the war ended, father came to us. He negotiated for a tract of land, which he farmed.

"I remained with my folks until I was 27 years old. During this period of my life I assisted father in operating the farm. I married at the age of 21 and at the time I was 27 my family consisted of a wife and child. I then decided to cast my lot with the State of Texas.

"Accordingly, I moved to Texas in 1885, locating in Clay co. I secured work on a farm being developed by Tom Horn. About this time, farms began to appear in Clay county,

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scattered far between. Tom Horn, a Kentuckian, came to Clay county and bought 600 acres of land, which he fenced with wire.

"My wages were \$1.00 per day. In addition to this wage, he furnished me a shack to house my family, also fuel for cooking and heating. With the \$1.00 per day received I provided food and cloths for my wife and one child. 3 "At the time I began working for Horn, he had 50 acres of land under cultivation, planted in corn and cotton. When we were not busy with the crops, we cleared and broke land.

"We used a six ox team hitched to a breaking plow turning the sod. The plow was a long beam implement with a coulter fastened to the beam and the plow point. The purpose of the coulter was to cut the turf and roots. At times, the six oxen were compelled to lay all their strength into the yoke to pull the plow. The man who hold the plow, which was my job, was under a constant strain and would be tossed right and left. Not only would one be compelled to use all his arm and shoulder strength, but would have to be constantly bracing himself with one or two other of his legs. This was one of the hard jobs done by two oldtimers, who prepared the soil of Texas for cultivation.

"Most of the land in Clay county, at that time, was a cattle range. However, in the Henrietta section, most of the ranges were enclosed with wire fence. The open range of that day existed farther west.

"In the vicinity of Horn's farm were several ranches. The Derrick ranch was north of us. Bill Knuckle's and the [Wright's?] ranches were also in the adjacent territory. Each of these ranches consisted of several sections of land enclosed ny fence.

"After working two years for Horn, I accepted a job on the Wright ranch.

'Before I talk about my life while on the range, I shall relate an experience I had and took some part in. It was the fight against enclosing the whole section within a fence. 4 "The Red River cattle Co. [leased?] many sections of land in Clay county and some in the east

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part of Archer county, [together?] with some in the west part of [gue?] county. This cattle company intended to fence in their land. But by so doing, a number of small ranchers and settlers would be enclosed. In other words, the Red River Cattle Co. would become master over all the territory. Posts were set, extending from the east part of Archer county to the west part of Montague county, running in two lines, east and west. One across the north part of Clay county and the other across the south part. This was done in 1885.

“The wire was laid on the ground along the line of the posts and, in a few places, it was fastened to the posts.

“The small ranchers and settlers discussed their situation. It was obvious to them that all the small fellows would be pushed out of the territory. They decided to take the necessary steps to prevent the cattle company from hogging all the country. Putting their ideas into action, a volunteer committee was formed and was composed of about 100 men. This committee was armed with sharp axes and they attacked the posts and wire during the dark hours. All posts and wire were cut. The posts were cut off at the ground and the wire hacked into a worthless pile of junk. It required several nights to complete the job, but it was a thorough piece of work when the committee quit.

“The work proved to be successful, because the Red River Cattle Co. did not attempt to rebuild the fence thereafter.

“I was not much of a rawhide when I began working on the Wright ranch. I could ride a hoss, but did not know how to 5 wrangle one. I could halfway throw the lasso, but would miss more critters than I tried to catch. While working for Horn, I learned to handle the rope a little while attending to Horn's tame stock.

“The crew of waddies who worked for Wright were mighty decent and did all they could teaching me how to master a bucking bronco and handle the [lasso?].

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“Handling the lasso is a matter of timing. The general idea prevailing is that the lasso is thrown on the critter. But, the fact is, the loop is thrown in the way of the critter, except when a critter is standing still, and the animal travels into the loop. For instance, if one desires to catch a moving critter by the leg with a lasso, the loop is thrown so it arrives at the proper spot at the correct second for the animal to step into the loop.

“After going to work on Wright ranch, it was only a short time till I could handle the rope sufficiently to do the work.

“Due to the fact that the range was fenced, part of the range riding work was unnecessary, but fence riding was required to watch for breaks. One rider did nothing else but ride the fence line to examine the fence. It was necessary to keep the fence in as near perfect condition as possible. A break through the fence by the herd during a severe storm would be disastrous, because if the storm was prolonged the herd would drift many miles and many animals would be lost. Also, days of hunting would be required gathering strays.

“The fence rider repaired all minor defects, but a repair crew repaired all major breaks. 6

“The old time roundup, when all the ranches in a section of country united as one outfit and worked their herds together, was not held, because fences held each [?] separated and thus removed the necessity of a general roundup.

[Each?] Spring the Wright's herd of 3,000 head were bunched, a hundred or so at a time. The calves were branded and other cattle examined and counted. In the Fall the herd was again counted and examined. At other times we were kept busy giving general attention which a herd required, such as caring for the sick, crippled and [weak?] animals. Driving sale stock to the Fort Worth market was a frequent job.

“To gather a sale herd, it was necessary to work through the entire herd, cutting out the grade wanted. Sometime it would be three's, then the two's or maybe the four's. “We lived in a ranch house and, due to the fence night riding, watching the herd was not necessary,

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[except?] for one man to keep an eye on the herd. Our food was excellently cooked and the supply of a good variety was abundant.

“The job on the ranch was more satisfactory to me than the farm job, because I received my board and 35.00 per month. I housed my family in a shack near the ranch and was able to be at home at night the greater part of the time.

“I worked for Wright three years and enjoyed the range work. The waddies spent many enjoyable hours during their off time. They were always doing something to entertain themselves. They were either practicing with the rope, gun, playing cards or telling stories. 7 “On the Wright outfit we did not have any outstanding shot or roper, but all the men were good at their work. I worked on only one ranch, therefore cannot make comparison.

“I can say that we had some of the top story tellers. I heard some of the orniest tales told by those waddies that I have ever heard since. I have forgotten most or the stories, but I may get together one which struck me as humorous and registered on my mind. One night the waddies were talking about the different kinds of work they had tried. One of the fellows who had spent about all of his working years on a cattle range told the following:

“Back a number of years ago when I was a young lad, I decided to quit the range. I found a job as clerk in a drygoods store. The second week I worked there a young lady, a rancher's daughter, was eloping with one of her father's waddies. She had left home without a proper supply of stockings; therefore, came into the store to buy a pair. She wanted to put the stockings on at once, but we had no convenient place for her to make the change. I took the matter up with the boss and he said:

“You come out from behind the counter and let the lady make the [change?] there, but if you look I'll discharge you'.

“ Well, after I lost ny job I became disgusted with clerking and returned to the range.

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"After quitting the range, I negotiated for a tract of land and devoted the rest of my time to farming, until I became too old to work.